

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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JACK DOYLE'S DAUGHTER.

BY R. E. FRANKILLON.

PART IV. PHOEBE'S FORTUNE.

CHAPTER VIII. OLD CLOTHES.

NOWHERE is about the only point in the whole universe where nobody has yet succeeded in arriving; for we cannot be absolutely sure that no human foot has ever stood upon that spot of the earth's surface where the points of the compass cease to have a meaning. Phoebe had certainly done her best to reach a metaphorical north pole, where north, east, west, and therefore south also, exist no more. But, even in this nearest approach to Nowhere that she could find, an onward path had opened itself out before her; she could not contrive to be absolutely alone in a world where other men and women are.

The fear of again meeting her ex-duenna had hastened her departure from the dangerous quarters of her hotel, and had thus thrown her, perforce, upon the help of the painter who, by the very simple process of being really interested in her without any end of his own to gain—I know it is in fashion to deny such a possibility, but let it go—had won her trust, and might have won her confidence if this had been capable of being expressed in any comprehensive way. For the same instinct that made Phoebe trust Richard Esdaile, as she had never been able to trust John Doyle, also made her aware that her new patron was the last man on earth who would forbear to laugh outright at a tale of Polish counts and Turkish slave-merchants in disguise. She is not the first who, believing in nonsense, dares not expose it to ridicule lest it should be laughed away. Is it not possible

to believe and yet not to believe? And yet, perhaps, the belief which dares to court ridicule is the only sort worth a straw. Phoebe was clinging to the ghosts of her beliefs with a desperate resolution which, when they had really been part of herself, they had never called for. She had to believe in something, if it were only that she might remain certain of her own reality. And if she gave up the certain knowledge that she had enemies—well, she would be driven to dream of the possibility of having friends. And that, without the least tinge of the most innocent hypocrisy, she could not believe.

Esdaile received her at his studio the next morning in studious silence, and studied her a full half-hour before speaking a word that his sketch did not call for. Then he said:

"I have settled about your rooms, and what you are to pay. The only question, I suppose, is how you are to pay anything; and I'm not intruding on your secrets when I suggest that you've not been in the habit of living for nothing. Let me see—I think we agreed that there's nothing you can do; so the whole situation is awkward exceedingly. You've quite determined not to go back to your friends?"

"I can't go back to what I never had," said Phoebe.

"Which means you are an obstinate young woman. But don't you see that you'll have to starve?"

Phoebe sighed.

"I don't suppose I should like to starve. But other women don't starve——"

"But other women do—hundreds of them; just because hundreds of women would rather starve than do worse. I have

a certain faith in women, Miss Vernon. It's because I don't know very much about them, perhaps, old bachelor as I am; but, after all, I don't suppose that experience of one or two is quite thrown away. Do you know that we stand in a very extraordinary relation to one another, you and I?"

"Very likely," said Phoebe. "Nothing seems so very extraordinary, now."

"So I used to think, at your age. At mine, everything is wonderful, and everything is new. That is one of the compensations of growing old, that we grow young. Here am I, a bachelor, taking into a sort of charge, a stray young woman, of whom I know nothing but that she is sailing under false colours, and whom I never saw till the day before yesterday. I want nothing of her but the loan of her eyes, and she wants nothing of me. I don't suppose we are ever likely to know much more of one another than we do now. Do you clearly understand that you, to put it plainly, must take my help, until you come to your senses, or starve?"

"I can't indeed."

"How do you propose to pay your rent, if you please?"

"Mr. Marcus said——"

"You shall have nothing to do with Mr. Marcus, or with Mr. anybody, except Mr. Esdaile; and with him just as little as you can. There is just one thing you can do for your living, and I am the only person you can do it for. Do you know anything of painters and their ways? No? Then I will show you something about them. If you will simply come to my studio at such times as I may send for you by letter, you shall have a fee—yes; that's the proper word—a fee of—let me see—two guineas a week whether you're wanted or no. It is honourable work I assure you; and just the face and figure that we want, you know I told you so at our first meeting—we painters can't afford to lose. And don't think you'll earn your bread-and-butter lightly. You'll have to come whenever you're wanted, in all weathers, and sit in uncomfortable attitudes for as long as I want; and, in fact, serve a tyrant for a master, at very poor pay."

He watched her sharply, to see whether this barefaced attempt to trick Phoebe into letting herself be grossly overpaid for doing nothing should be seen through and refused. So far, he had no cause to fear for the success of his pious fraud; for aught Phoebe knew, a painter's model might hold a proud position by right of office, and

might command salaries equal to those of leading ladies. But he read a certain hesitation, and he read it rightly, and was pleased.

"I have been friendly enough with you so far," said he, "because I wanted to prove to you that your coming to terms with me was the only rational thing you could do for yourself—accept the bargain, and I warn you that we shall be employer and employed, nothing more—a rigorous employer, and an absolutely independent employed. I shall be sorry for my own sake if you refuse; but be it as you will."

Phoebe remained silent. But "I must live," sighed she. "If I could only do something—anything; it feels like I don't know what to make my living by having a particular sort of eyes. . . . What would Phil say? What would he tell me was right to do? I should know what not to do then. . . . I don't think he would like it; I think he would tell me to say no—and that's enough. Yes, Mr. Esdaile; I will," said she aloud. Which meant, "Nobody shall be my master; I will be free."

"Thank you, Miss Vernon." His manner, always frosty, now became icy cold. Having gained his point, he resolved to treat her in such wise that she should complain of his rudeness and tyranny, but never of his being over kind. Her position would be safe and easy then, and scandal, if it should venture to lift its head, would be frozen before it could move its tongue.

So Phoebe's destiny, for the present, refused to lead her nowhere, and a kindly whim on the one side, a last rebellious impulse on hers, combined to place this heroine of romance in the sadly unromantic position of a painter's model. It is true that her pay belonged to regions of romance, but that she could not tell; nor could she justify her position by such brilliant precedents as those of Rubens's Wife, La Fornarina, Lady Hamilton, or the Venetian lady of Paris Bordone. Perhaps that was just as well, for some of the precedents might have had a much stronger repellent effect than the presumed displeasure of Phil. Her new lodging, not very far from Esdaile's house, was comfortable, and it struck her, knowing something of the humbler lodging-keeper class, from youthful experience of neighbours, that rents for rooms had very much fallen since she was a girl. But then neighbourhoods had naturally a good deal to do with such matters. Her change from Cautleigh Hall

and Harland Terrace did not cost her a single sigh—at last she was alone, and free. But it was not so agreeable to face the fact that, except when she was on duty at the studio, she had absolutely nothing to do, and was likely to be only too much alone.

Once upon a time she would have looked upon a prospect of perfect solitude, not to be broken by household duties towards a band of noisy brothers, and of endless leisure for castle-building and day-dreaming, and the perusal of all the novels that have been written from the beginning of the world, as a vision of Paradise. Paradise had come—and, having come, was Paradise no more. What were novels, now? Traitors and enemies, one and all. Even those yet more fascinating pictures of life as it is not, called plays, had proved no less misleading, and the flash of dramatic genius, for it was no less, that had for one supreme moment leapt up in her and broken forth from her, had been frozen as utterly as Esdaile had planned to freeze calumny—in its very birth, well-nigh before it had been born. At least so it seemed, for in truth Phœbe had all and more the dramatic genius that Marcus, the shopman, and Esdaile, the man of common sense, had failed to see. She could no more have acted to them, in cold blood, than she could cease to be herself—actress and audience in one. Had she been engaged by some rash manager, I know that she would, in some inspired moment, have leaped at one bound to the height of glory and have made his fortune and her own; but then she would have ruined him twice over at least before that moment came, and having once come, it might come never again. From that last and worst of tragedies, thanks to Richard Esdaile, Phœbe Burden was spared; and I am thankful that I have had to tell another tale—nothing worse than that of one who had to find out for herself, with nobody to help her, that not one of us is strong enough to create a world; that the world is precisely what it is, and neither less nor more—that, though there are some thousand millions of souls therein, there are not a thousand million worlds, but one world, and that is the same to us all, with the same right, and the same wrong.

Esdaile proved both an irregular and a hard master. Phœbe never knew when to expect a summons, and, when she obeyed it, she, to all intents, might be a marble statue to him; he was never warmer than ice to her. Never

again did he preach to her, or at her, or suggest that a confidence on her part would not be thrown away. She had never met a human being of this stamp before. Doyle was rough and stern, but she would not have had a woman's instinct had she thought him cold. Sir Charles Bassett was not rough, and was to Doyle what steel is to iron; but she knew well enough that had he hated a woman he would have shown his hate only in the form of doubled courtesy. Phil could outdo both in the roughness of iron and the hardness of steel, but then, in him, the furnace never went without its fire. Esdaile, when once the bargain between them had been struck, resumed his cynical mask, and added the element of ice to those of iron and steel. He made Phœbe feel that she might serve him for a year without being alarmed by a look he could give her or by a word that he could say. So it was best, no doubt; but Phœbe was learning fast to be a woman, and women do not like to be treated as Pygmalion did not treat even a statue of stone.

"What is my life to mean?" thought she, when it had been drifting on after this fashion for some time. "It can't mean that I've been given thousands of discontents only to sit in a chair and let a painter stare at me as if he'd never seen such a thing before. I dare say my eyes are worth his buying now, as he says so; but that won't last for ever, unless things are always to be different with me than with other people," for, though she had burned her magical books, she had not even yet left off the bad habit of regarding herself as the heroine of a story. "I suppose I shall some day get old, if I don't die, and with nothing good to happen, except the last, in all that while. If I were like other girls I could play, or sing, or dance for my bread. Perhaps it wouldn't be better in itself than what I'm doing now, but it would make things happen, and people come, and perhaps——"

But she was firm in one thing: she always resolutely cut in two a perhaps that might end in Phil. Someless distinct resolve formed itself in her mind that she might take to saving from her salary while it lasted, and then spend her savings in learning some more enduring and trustworthy accomplishment than that of having eyes. At any rate, it would be something to do, and since she had never really tried to use her brains, she had never discovered that study of any sort

will not serve for a mere time-killer. Even Dick's boisterous laughter and clattering boots, despised once by their owner's romantic sister, would have been welcome now.

One wet afternoon, tired with a morning's dreary sitting to no apparent purpose, seeing that her employer was attending to other matters half the time, and much more tired of herself, she mustered courage, and invaded the lower regions of the house where she lodged, and found the lady of the house busily engaged over the kitchen fire.

"Mrs. Hughes," said Phœbe nervously—for what heroine ever asked such question before?—"would you mind giving me a little plain sewing—stockings to darn, or anything you please? I'm sure you must want help, with all you've got to do."

"Stockings to darn, Miss Vernon? Why, I never heard of such a thing in all my born days!" exclaimed Mrs. Hughes, who, with her husband, looked up to Esdaile, their patron, with a reverence that they were eager to extend to a young lady with whose rent he had been good enough to honour them. Nor did Phœbe ever know how much, both in money and in words, she owed to Esdaile in this matter. "Want to darn my stockings—and you a young lady! Never did I ever hear of such a thing before."

"If you please," pleaded Phœbe, "or anything else—if it's anything I can do. But I think I could mend stockings and look over linen best, especially if it wants a great many buttons, and is very much frayed; I had a good deal of that sort of work when I was a girl——"

"And I'd like to know what you call yourself now!" said Mrs. Hughes, with a broad smile in which shone the whole of the kitchen fire. "Whatever would Mr. Esdaile say to such a thing, I'd like to know?"

"Did you ever in all your life, Mrs. Hughes, know what it means to have nothing to do?"

"I don't know as I did, miss; but I'd uncommonly like to try."

"Then, please let me try to let you do less. If there's one thing I love doing better than anything else, it's darning stockings with very large holes."

"Well, Miss Vernon, tastes do differ, as Mr. Esdaile says to John Hughes. I must own I like them small. But if you really do want to give yourself a treat, miss, I

won't stand in the light, though I sha'n't have the face to tell Mr. Esdaile."

"I assure you, Mrs. Hughes, he wouldn't mind," said Phœbe a little bitterly; for he had not asked her a single question about herself from the hour that she consented to become his model. "So please——"

Persuaded, though a little conscience-stricken, Mrs. Hughes left her mutton-chops, and turned over a confused basket of articles of clothing waiting for the needle.

"Here's some with biggish holes to be sure—they belong to the gentleman in the back attic, and a very odd sort of a gentleman too; scribble, scribble, scribble, all day long, and not much coming of it, I'm afraid. How his stockings get in such a state, if he don't get the nails in his boots, goodness knows, for he don't walk out so much as you. But, perhaps, Miss Vernon, you mightn't like to look after a strange gentleman's things——"

"So long as it isn't the strange gentleman himself," said Phœbe, "I'm sure I don't mind. There, I think I've picked out the worst. I'll carry them straight off into my room, and have a pleasant afternoon."

"Ah, miss! you'd be a treasure of a wife to a poor man," said Mrs. Hughes; "and so, I suppose you'll marry a rich one. It's the way of the world. I ought to have married high, and so I would, if I hadn't married John Hughes. Not but what we don't do pretty well, considering. You're all right, Miss Vernon; it's the gentleman in the attic troubles me. I had a writing gentleman up there once before, who never had his pen out of his hand, though not half so tight in it as this one's, and he owes me three weeks' rent to this day."

Phœbe was not interested in the strange gentleman. But the prospect of having something to occupy her fingers, and that something unquestionably useful, proved the continuation of a happy inspiration. Is it quite possible for an amateur seamstress to work upon a stranger's clothes without speculating a little about the wearer, whether he is old or young, and a dozen equally unimportant things? Probably Phœbe, wholesomely occupied, thought for once as others think. But such thoughts merely passed along the surface, and did not give her any real interest in the gentleman who managed, without walking, to wear holes in his stockings large enough to thrust a fair-sized fist through.

The next day chanced to be Sunday. Esdaile was a man who made no distinction between days, and either heedlessly, or else by way of experiment upon the nature of her character and training, omitted to make any in the case of Phoebe. She had received a message to attend the studio at nine o'clock in the morning, and to undergo an hour's minute study of her hands. Indeed, by this time Esdaile must have known this by no means too beautiful girl by heart; but the hands were a happy thought, by judicious economy he might contrive to give a week to each finger, and then he might proceed to a detailed study of her nose. He dismissed her, to her relief, and not improbably to his own, at half-past ten.

It was a most unlikely hour to meet anybody whom she knew. She had certainly never belonged to a church-going family at any period of her career; and least of all had she the faintest expectation of meeting her heroic lover, Stanislas Adrianski, who, if a free man, was doubtless in bed, and, if still in service, down in Lincolnshire helping his master to rise. And yet, coming towards her along the street, she was convinced that she saw Stanislas, and, at the same time, was convinced that he saw her. As to the nature of her thoughts about him, she had given up thinking; as to the nature of her feelings towards him, she was sure. Since her visit at Cautleigh Hall, and even since the renewal of her relationship with Phil, she had seen him with different eyes, and had, in some fashion, contrived to see through him, though without seeing anything very definite on the other side. She would have flown from Phil with all her speed, while hoping with all her heart to fail, but from Stanislas her instinct was to hide. After all she was not quite sure of its being Stanislas, she did not dare to look a second time. So she let herself be carried away by a current that happened, by good fortune, to be setting through a church door. It was the last place into which she was likely to be followed by friend or foe.

Of course she had been to church with the others at Cautleigh, and, as Sir Charles had noticed, shown a peculiar quickness in picking up the forms with which she had obviously been unacquainted on her first arrival. But what she had heard there had never chanced to touch her inward ear. Even now, having been shown into a seat, she went through the forms of sitting,

rising, and kneeling with merely mechanical precision, thinking mainly of whether it had been really Stanislas Adrianski whom she had seen, and if he had really seen her, and if he had followed her. Nor was her attention fairly caught until she heard the words: "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land."

The command seemed to be spoken in mockery. How could she pray to have her heart inclined to honour a shadow—she who had never known the phantom of a mother, and whose father had been represented by one man who had sold her and by another who had bought her; even if her worst fears were unfounded, a pair of slave-dealers, and nothing more? The good people who sat next her must have taken her for some undutiful daughter, tortured by remorse, when she could not restrain a sob that followed words so little likely to call forth a burst of feeling. She stood up at the Creed, but it meant nothing to her—beliefs of any sort were no longer any concern of hers. She sat through the sermon—it told her nothing at all. But presently she heard yet another verse:

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

As soon as she returned home, having met no trouble on the way, she went into the kitchen.

"I want some more stockings to darn, if you please, Mrs. Hughes," said she.

"Mercy! On a Sunday, Miss Vernon? Have you forgot the lady that sewed on a Sunday, and pricked her finger, and was buried in Westminster Abbey?"

"I forgot," said Phoebe. "But something I must do. Have you got a prayer-book in the house, Mrs. Hughes?"

"Ah, that's more like. I don't hold with pleasuring nor working on a Sunday; but with getting your dinner comfortable, and taking a good long nap over your Bible, hold I do."

So, by yet another chance, Phoebe found some new books over which she could ask herself, as of old, "Ah, if all this were true; and for me!" And, being no sceptic by nature, as her history amply shows, she, though as yet vaguely enough, discovered some things which nobody had ever tried to teach her—not even Phil.

ST. GEORGE AND HIS DAY.

UNTIL within the last century there was probably no more patriotic and exclusive people in the world than the English, and by the English people we mean the inhabitants of the Forty Shires pure and simple, as distinguished from Scotsmen, Irishmen, and Colonials, and not the wide-embracing term which admits any man of British blood into the English pale. With their neighbours north of the Tweed Englishmen assimilated themselves more rapidly than with those on the other side of St. George's Channel, but even with the former it was a long and gradual process. Dr. Johnson was but one of very many Englishmen of influence and position who regarded Scotsmen as aliens and intruders; the Squire Westerns and Sir Roger de Coverleys of the same century looked upon them as a step worse than Frenchmen; an Englishman would rise and leave the room if a Scotsman sat himself beside him in a coffee-house, whilst, as Macaulay relates, the Englishman who had wandered as far north as the Highlands of Scotland and had returned safe and sound was looked upon as an adventurer of as remarkable a type as Livingstone or Serpa Pinto of to-day. Nowadays we can afford to smile at the narrow-mindedness and irrational prejudice which our ancestors mistook for patriotism, and the most ardent disciple of St. George is forced to admit that our present position in the world is in no slight way owing to the abilities, the industry, the zeal, and the valour of Scotsmen. And, Englishlike, when we had conquered our prejudices, we went to the opposite extreme, lost all pride in our individuality, forgot our patron saint, and allowed his festival to sink into oblivion, so that it is pleasant to look back at the sentimental side of the subject in a day when so little sentiment about it exists. It is to be doubted if half-a-dozen educated Englishmen out of every hundred know the day of their patron saint. The lower classes have, from the sheer love of a holiday, clung to him with a certain amount of fidelity, but amongst the higher classes it is doubtful if, but for his appearance on the coinage and on the Order of the Garter, he would be remembered at all. Where half-a-dozen Scotsmen are gathered together, no matter in what quarter of the world, on the last day of November the festival of St. Andrew is celebrated by a dinner, and in many places—notably in the United States—

St. Patrick's Day is observed with equal enthusiasm; but who ever heard of a St. George's dinner?

Once, in Shanghai, the writer attended a meeting at which the question of a St. George's dinner was mooted, but the proceedings were tame, no enthusiasm was evinced, the matter was dropped and never revived. Surely there is as large a field for self-laudation and mutual admiration in the history of English literature, prowess, and enterprise, as in the histories of Scotland or Ireland. Solely and fatally Englishmen possess not the spirit of cohesion so strongly developed in their neighbours. When Scot meets Scot in faraway lands, hands are shaken, gutturals are exchanged, and a friendship is formed which is almost masonic in its depth and durability; but if solitary English Smith were to meet solitary English Jones at the North Pole, a cold nod and a "good-morning" would probably be the extent of their acquaintance.

Antiquaries and historians differ much upon the question as to who St. George really was.

Gibbon gives it out as an indisputable fact that he was born in Cilicia; that he was chosen by the powerful sect of Arians as successor to Athanasius in the archbishopric of Alexandria; that his life was degraded by every vice; and that finally, under the Emperor Julian, the people, maddened by his extortions and avarice, rose up against him and murdered him. The historian contemptuously adds that this man, "who assumed the mask of a martyr, a saint, and a Christian hero, has been transformed into the renowned St. George of England, the patron of arms, of chivalry, and of the Garter!" But the old English ballads are unanimous in making him out a native of the soil. According to them he was the son of a Coventry lord, whose wife had in childbirth a horrible dream that a dragon was devouring her internally. The child came into the world, she died, and soon after his birth he disappeared and was brought up in the wilds, wandered abroad to Egypt, where, in the neighbourhood of Syene, he met with the fair Sabra, who was condemned to be the prey of a terrible dragon. The dragon he slew, and sued for the hand of the princess, but her father was obdurate and sent him to Persia to be put out of the way, much in the same way as Hamlet was sent to England. However, St. George slew his would-be murderer and won his bride.

Spenser, in *The Faery Queene*, alludes to this popular acceptance of the truth about St. George :

And thou, faire ympe, sprung out from English
race,
However now accompted Elfin sonne.

Mr. Hone remarks that Russia seems to have had a previous claim to St. George. Many coins and seals still exist there with the figure of a man fighting a dragon thereon impressed, and it is probable that Russia received him with her religion from the Greeks, for amongst the latter people he was popular in the fourth and fifth centuries as the "Great Martyr," in allusion to another version of his story, which tells that he suffered death under the Emperor Diocletian. At any rate, to this day there are six or seven ancient churches dedicated to St. George in the city of Constantinople, and amongst the Mahometans the figure of a man in combat with a dragon is revered under the name of Gergis. Some antiquaries have gone so far as to attribute his origin in Europe to the Tartars, who certainly brought with them upon their gigantic invasion of Europe coins bearing the man and dragon impression, which to this day is the crest of the Russian grand dukes.

To England, St. George probably came from the crusades, in which undertakings the English warriors were distinguished by the sign of a red cross, and it is certain that the English soldiers used his name as a battle-cry long before it was publicly ordained to be so used by Henry the Seventh. One hundred and ninety years before the adoption of St. Andrew as the Scottish national saint, and many years before the selection of St. Denis by France, and St. David by Wales, Edward the Third had instituted the order of the Garter in the name of St. George, and the day was kept as a great national festival although it had previously been ordained to be celebrated as a "lesser holiday" by the Parliament of Oxford in the year 1255.

As a battle-cry we have frequent evidence of the use of St. George's name in Shakespeare, and the dramatists. Thus in the play of *Richard the Third*, Richmond cries :

Sound drums and trumpets boldly and cheerfully,
God and St. George ! Richmond and victory !

And again, Richard exclaims :

Our ancient word of courage, fair St. George,
Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons !

In the play of *Henry the Sixth*,

there are four separate appeals to St. George ; in Marlowe's *Edward the Second*, Warwick and Edward respectively shout :

St. George for England and the right !

In Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the trainband youths playing at chivalry, frequently call upon St. George. In the ballad of *The Battle of Otterburne*, fought in the year 1387, we find the couplet :

St. George the bright, our ladies' knight,
To name they (the English) were full fain ;

and in *Brave Lord Willoughby* :

But at last they gave a shout,
Which echoed through the sky ;
God and St. George for England !
The conquerors did cry.

In many old documents previous to the reign of Henry the Seventh, appear royal ordinances commanding the use of St. George's Cross, and St. George's battle-cry, to all English soldiers serving abroad.

The Red Cross Knight of the Faery Queene is of course typical of chivalrous England, for we read :

Then St. George shall called be,
St. George of Merrie England, the signe of Victorie.

So much for the knight himself, now for his day.

Until quite a recent period, the twenty-third day of April was kept as a festival in honour of England's patron saint. As above mentioned, the Oxford Parliament of 1255 ordained it to be kept as a "lesser holiday," but the people had learnt to love the name which had so often nerved the arms of their soldiers to victory, and it became, perhaps, the most universally observed anniversary, with the exception of the great religious feasts of Easter and Christmas. In Shakespeare's *Henry the Sixth*, Bedford says :

Bonfires in France forthwith I am to make,
To keep our great St. George's feast withal.

Old sports were ordained to be held during "the first whole week in May," that being the most approximate period to our April 23rd, and these sports were kept up with unabated enthusiasm in most parts of England, and especially in the south and west, until the beginning of the present century. At Leicester a great annual pageant, called "the Riding of the George," was held ; the town observed strict holiday, business was entirely suspended, and evening closed on the sports of the day with feasting and revelry. In Dublin, probably as a gentle reminder that English rule was supreme, the pageant of St. George was ordered to be religiously

observed, and this invariably gave rise to disturbances and riots which filled the gaols with misdemeanants and the city with broken heads for many days after. Henry the Seventh seems to have been a rigid upholder of the glory of St. George, and history relates how Elizabeth of York, his queen, attended the pageant of St. George on "Garter Day," clad in crimson velvet, and mounted on a palfrey of which the housings were white, ornamented with red roses. So late as the beginning of the present century it was the custom for gentlemen to wear blue coats with dragon buttons upon April 23rd. George the Fourth changed the celebration of his birthday from August the 12th to St. George's Day, and the festival was marked in London by the annual procession of mail-coaches from Lombard Street to Millbank and back, the drivers and guards brilliant in new uniforms, decked with huge bouquets and rosettes, and the vehicles gorgeous with new paint and burnished metal-work. In some villages of Kent, to this day, upon the 23rd of April, boys on hobby-horses go through the pageant of St. George and the Dragon, after which a contribution is levied upon the inhabitants, which is expended upon a feast at the principal inn. But, with these few exceptions, it is nowadays difficult to find amongst the people any celebration of the anniversary of England's patron saint.

St. George's Day is also the anniversary of the birth and death of our most typically English poet, Shakespeare, and the day is marked at Stratford-upon-Avon and elsewhere by the production of one of his plays by the Shakespeare Society, and by most literary societies in one way or another.

NUMBER SEVEN.

"YES, there's seven of us," said a bluff good-looking man, withdrawing his head from the carriage window, "three trains ahead of us and three trains ahind of us, and that's what they call the block system," and hereupon the man gave a short but jolly laugh, and resigned himself once more to repose. Now the way in which he took this repose was rather singular. The scene was a third-class carriage, with no arms to the seats of course, but our friend in the corner knew how to make himself comfortable, and propped himself on the shoulder of his companion, a woman who seemed much older than himself, old enough to

have been his mother indeed. She was not his mother, quite evidently, however. The affectionate glances she gave him every now and then were not of a maternal character, and yet she was not the kind of woman one would have credited with much passionate feeling. Hard she was and rather sour-looking, her eyebrows very much raised, and the corners of her mouth strongly drawn down. But she sustained the burden of her companion's arm with meek complacency, as if she were quite prepared to make herself his footstool if occasion required, a kind of homage that the young man accepted with the most lordly indifference. He was strikingly handsome when you came to look at his face, with glossy brown beard and moustache, and an air of prosperity about him; attaching itself to his massive gold chain, his diamond scarf-pin, and heavy sleeve-links.

We were halted somewhere in the country—exact spot unknown—owing to some stoppage on the line. All was dark and quiet about us, except for one red eye in the distance, which persistently refused to look any other way, and the sound of escaping steam from distant engines. And a silent tired company we were; one or two stray volunteers, in soiled and dusty uniforms, from the review, and other travellers who had become involved in the rush and crush of the day and found themselves hours behind time and still far enough away from their destination. Among these last, an elderly dame who had become quite nervous owing to the numerous stoppings and delays, so nervous that she addressed the hard-featured woman opposite: "Don't you think, ma'am, that there's danger of trains running into us while we are waiting here?"

The woman thus addressed cast an appealing look at her companion, who roused himself suddenly from what could only have been a cat's sleep, and took upon himself to reply to the question. "Do I think there's danger, ma'am?" said the handsome young man; "well, it's difficult to say when there isn't danger. Only my notion is that danger comes when you least expect it. And I ought to know something about it, ma'am, for I was a signalman once upon a time."

"Oh, you were a signalman," said the old dame, looking at the man with interest; feeling, perhaps, a sense of protection in his presence, as a man who would be sure to know if anything went wrong. "A signalman; then surely you must know a great deal about it?"

"Yes, I think we could tell them a thing or two, couldn't we, old lady?" remarked the ex-signalman, giving his companion a playful shake of the shoulders, a caress she acknowledged by a soft submissive glance.

"I dare say we could, Edward," she replied quite in a whisper, and Edward shook his head with fierceness and relapsed into silence.

"Oh, then do tell it," cried the old lady, "I take such an interest in signals."

"Well, ma'am," began the ex-signalman abruptly, "did you ever see a triangular junction? Perhaps you haven't, for there ain't many of 'em. But there was one on our line, the Brewminster and Dowset Junction, a contractor's line, mark you, and I was working for Macduff and Co., the contractors. The line was just finished then, so to say, and we were looking for the inspector every day to pass it. Now, perhaps, you may know what a railway inspector is. A sharpish crew, mind you, pretty bright in their ways—army gents mostly. But they know a lot; at least, they get told a lot, don't you see. And there's a difference, too, among 'em. Some's a bit easier than others, and some's a bit harder. And when Mr. Macduff, our head man to the contract, got a letter to say Colonel Bookem was coming next day to inspect the line, ah! he was in a right bad temper that day, for Bookem was about the sharpest of the lot and the hardest to get over. For our people were in a desperate hurry to get the line open. Reason why: they could touch a big lump of money the minute the line was declared open, and money was what they wanted bad enough. And it was that very day I had to go up to the office for a bit of business of my own, and I up and spoke to the gaffer. 'Mr. Macduff,' says I, 'I want seventy-two hours' leave, if you please, to count from Thursday night's shift.' 'And what's that for?' roared Macduff, scowling at me as if I had been a thief. 'I'd have told you, Mr. Macduff,' says I, 'if you'd not have jumped the words out of my mouth. I'm going to get spliced to a little girl at Birmingham, and I can't do it in less time than that nohow.' And at that he grinds his teeth and looks fiercely over my head. 'Why can't they invent a hautomatic signalman,' says he, 'as don't want splicing nor nothing?' But he wasn't a bad sort, after all, wasn't old Duff, and presently he looks at me again. 'Ned,' he says, 'we are going to have the line open a Monday.' 'Never!' says I, for I hadn't a notion it

would be ready so soon. 'Yes, it is so,' he said again. 'To-morrow's Wednesday, and Bookem is coming down to examine the line, and we shall have the Board of Trade certificate down on Saturday in time to open on Monday. And look here, Ned, what's your wages now—eh? Thirty shillings, is it? Well, I'll put you on the triangular junction, and you shall have thirty-five.' And with that I made my best bow and backed out of the office. He hadn't told me I might have my leave in so many words, but I took that for granted and got all ready to start.

"Ah, she was a nice little thing, that lass of mine at Birmingham!" went on Edward, with a certain huskiness of speech, "the youngest one of seven, as had all married well, all but she, and well-to-do her parents were and sorry enough to part with her. And for to go and marry a signalman! Why, her sisters were mad with her! There was one had married a puddler."

"La!" interrupted a squeamish-looking young woman who sat at the farther corner of the carriage, "a puddler! Well, that must be a dirty trade. I'd sooner have a signalman than that."

"You don't know what I mean, miss," resumed Edward severely. "He was an iron puddler, and making his four-ten or five pounds a week, and naturally didn't think much of me with my thirty shillings, and liable to be spoke to by any jack-in-office. But she stuck to me through it all, did Liz. 'And when you've got a home for me, you come and fetch me, Ned,' says she. And a pretty little home it was, thanks to our gaffer. A bit of a cottage up in a wood just over the triangular junction. There was honeysuckle and ferns and all kinds of green things about it—not that I thought much of that, but she did, for she doted on all such things, and, living in a smoky street in a dirty town, it was like a fairy tale to her all I told her about the pretty little country cottage. I recollect the day before our wedding-day we had a little trip together into the country. Of course there was nothing could suit Liz but green fields and trees, and every pretty little cot we come across, 'Are ours anything like so pretty as that, Ned?' she'd ask. 'Why, ours is twice as pretty,' I'd say; and with that she'd give my arm a little hug. 'Oh, Ned, that's too much happiness,' she'd cry. Not that there was much danger of that, according as I've found it," continued Edward, stroking his beard nervously. "You don't want to be frightened of being

too happy. There's plenty about will take care you ain't that. Oh, you needn't look at me, old lady," seeing that his companion had turned a reproachful glance upon him—a glance softer and more pathetic than you would have expected from such a hard-featured person. "We're happy enough together. There ain't any blame upon you. Only don't you see there's something in the feelings of a young chap and his girl when they're real fond of each other, as we were, that the rest of your days don't seem to correspond to somehow.

"But I must hark back a bit," resumed Edward after taking a slight refresher from a case-bottle he carried in his pocket, and politely offering the bottle to the company. "It was on the Wednesday before my wedding-day that Colonel Bookem came down to inspect the line. And busy enough they were, he and old Duff, running up and down the line on a little contractor's engine, and me with them to pull the switches and levers. And there were things here and there he found fault with, and put 'em down in a book till he got a pretty long list of them. 'Now don't you think I'd better come again in a fortnight,' he said to old Duff, 'when all these things have been attended to?' 'Oh, no, no,' says Duff, as anxious as possible. 'Don't do that. I give you my word of honour,' says he, 'that all this shall be put right and just as you'd like it within twenty-four hours.' And Bookem looked doubtful, but he said: 'All right, I'll go on then.' And just then we come to the triangular junction, and Bookem jumped off the engine and ran off to the signal-box, and me and Duff after him as fast as our legs could carry us. But as we went along Duff catches me by the arm. 'Ned,' whispers he quite low but very fierce, 'whatever you do, don't pull Number Seven.' That was lever Number Seven, don't you see, and I saw in a minute what I heard afterwards, how there was something wrong with that set of points. Now you may judge there was a pretty good row of levers in that box, and, thinks I to myself, there won't be no great difficulty in missing Number Seven. And Duff begins singing out to me, 'Pull Number Three, pull Number Five,' and so on, just to show the inspector how clean they all worked. And Colonel Bookem looks on for a minute. 'Now,' says he, taking Duff by the arm, 'it strikes me that I've got to inspect this box, and not you; so if you don't mind, Duff, I'll trouble you to stand outside.' And Duff couldn't help

but go, and stood there on the steps watching everything through the glass as a cat does a mouse. Now, whether it was accidental, or whether the colonel had overheard our little whisper, I don't know to this day, but no sooner were we alone together than he sings out: 'Now, my man, pull Number Seven!' And I got hold of Number Nine, by accident, and pulled it over and looked at him quite innocent-like. 'I said Number Seven,' says he quite stern. 'You're not fit for a signalman if you don't keep your wits about you better than that. Pull Number Seven.' I thought it was all over then. If that lever didn't work he'd never pass the line that day, and Macduff and Company would be up the spout, I expect, and me out of a berth very likely. And so I put my back into that lever, more out of spite than anything else, thinking I should break it sooner than move it. But, lo and behold! it came over as easy as any of them. 'That will do,' says Bookem, and shuts up his book, and presently I heard Duff hollering for a special engine to take the colonel to catch the London train, and glad enough we were to see his back. And soon after I met one of my mates and he said: 'Well, Ned, how did you manage to pull Number Seven?' 'Oh, easy enough,' said I. 'Ah,' said he, laughing, 'you've got me to thank for that. Didn't old Duff send me spinning down the line with a crowbar? and when he lifted his hand I hauled the points over bodily, else you'd never have pulled that lever.'

"Well, we both of us had a good laugh over that; for there's always something pleasing in getting over them Gov'ment chaps. And a jolly supper we got out of Duff that night over at The King's Head, which was right opposite the triangular junction. And the landlady of The King's Head was this good lady here"—giving his companion a friendly shake—"seeing as I lodged there for a bit, and jolly kind she'd been to me—mending my things and looking after me as if I'd been her own son. Well, and so you did, old girl," noticing another half-appealing look from his companion; "there's nothing to be ashamed of in that. But when I told her that I was going off next day to bring home my little lass, you never saw anybody look so queer as she did. 'Why, Edward,' she cried, 'you never told me you were going to be married.' No more I hadn't; a young chap don't tell that to all the world. Perhaps I shouldn't have had my shirts

mended so beautiful if all that had come out. However, I must say, when she got over the surprise, she behaved first-rate, slipped two pound into my hand to help me through with, and wished me all the happiness in the world.

"Well, I needn't tell you about the wedding, only we were married on a Saturday, and nothing would do for my little girl but she must get home to our own little cottage that night. And it's a good long journey from Birmingham, so that the day was pretty well on before we got to Brewminster where our line began. And such doings as there were at Brewminster, ready for the opening of the line, arches over the road and flags hanging out, and Liz was delighted, and would have it they were all for our wedding. Well, we had our tea at Brewminster, and then I thought we should have done the rest of the journey on the engine, seeing as the line wasn't opened yet, but as it happened Macduff himself was going down with an engineer; and so they clapped on a composite coach, and me and my little lass we had a compartment all to ourselves, and travelled along as happy as you please. I never saw the sun to shine so sweet as it did that evening, nor the trees to look so green, and there was little waterfalls coming over the rocks, and my little darling more pleased with it all than I can tell you. But getting tired out at last she fell to sleep on my shoulder, only I'd promised to wake her up when we came in sight of our little cot.

"Well, I must have been half asleep myself, but I was awake enough to know as how we were just coming to the triangular junction, when all of a minute we came to a dead stop with a kind of grinding jar, and the whole carriage seemed to crackle up about us. Next minute I was out on the bank and had dragged my little lass out with me. There was Macduff raging about with his face all cut open. 'It's that cursed Number Seven,' he cried; 'those idiots had never put it right, and sent us smash into the goods.' 'Are you hurt, Ned?' he cried to me. 'No,' said I; 'I don't feel much hurt, but will you help me to carry my little lass, she's in a kind of swoon, and I can't get her round.' Well, my good lady here had been on the look-out for us, and she had my little darling taken into her house, as was close by, don't you see, and they sent an engine off to Brewminster for the doctor; but she lay there quite cold and stiff, and I was pretty

near out of my mind, calling to her like one frantic.

"And presently she opened her eyes, the poor little dear, but there was such a solemn awful look in them as took my breath away to see. 'Ned,' she whispers, I could just hear her, bending over her with my ear to her mouth, 'hold me, keep me; don't let me go.' Aye, and I'd have held her if man could, but I knew she was going away from me and I couldn't stop her, no not with giving my own life for her, as I'd willingly have done. And there was just a flutter in her eyelids, and a long gasp of breath, and then came a rattle in her throat. She was gone.

"That was a pretty wedding-day for a fellow, wasn't it, mates!" cried Edward, dashing the back of his hand across his eyes, as he looked hard out into the darkness—"only they say as all things is ordered for our good. And that might be; for don't you see I might have been a working signalman all the days of my life, only for this good lady here. For she was so kind to me, and so loving all the time I was half distracted like with my trouble, that after a bit I asked her if she wouldn't join in and make a match of it with me. And so we did, and now me and my good lady we keep one of the handsomest public-houses in London—you may guess which side the money came from, and we could go out any day we liked, and live like gentlefolks. But she's got her heart in the business, and I don't think she'd be happy to live retired. Would you, old lady?"

Her eyebrows were arched still higher, the corners of her mouth drawn lower, her mouth screwed up another turn tighter. But still she had a soft glance for Edward, and whispered shyly:

"It shall be as you please, dear."

And with that the engine whistled, and we began to move on slowly at first, and then getting into full speed; and presently we rattled past points and sidings towards a big junction.

"There's no Number Seven here, I hope," said the old lady, peering nervously out of the window.

"Well, ma'am, I don't expect there is; not one of that sort," rejoined Edward, laughing rather dismally. "But often enough running into a junction like this, I seem to feel my little lass's head upon my shoulder. What, do you get out here? Good-night, ma'am." And the old lady being gone he resigned himself to sleep

upon the shoulder of his faithful partner,
and was not to be drawn out any more
that night.

BUTTERCUPS.

I sit and watch my treasure laid
Beneath the snowy hawthorn's shade,
In slumber calm and deep;
The May-day sunbeams glint between
The lattice-work of white and green,
And kiss him in his sleep.

The morning long, across the grass
I heard his little footsteps pass,
In chase of bird and bee;
The morning long, I watched him play,
Bright blossom of my life's late May,
That came from Heaven to me!

The sunbeams kiss his little face,
The grass and king-cups interlace
Across his forehead white;
His tiny hands no longer hold
The buttercups of royal gold,
He plucked with such delight.

The buttercups he ran to grasp,
With hand quick-loosened from my clasp,
And pleasure-brimming eyes;
The buttercups, whose yellow dust
Hath soiled his fingers, as gold must,
If held too dear a prize.

Unwitting in his baby glee,
He robbed his playmate brown, the bee,
Of food for winter hours;
He gathered blossoms in his haste,
And now the treasure runs to waste
Of those bright golden flowers.

I kneel me down beside the lad,
And something joyful, something sad,
Swells from mine inmost heart;
God gave love's blossom for love's sake,
But grief and joy must mix to make
Complete the mother's part.

And mingled tides of feeling rush
Throughout my spirit, as I brush
The gold-dust from his palm;
He rests to-day within my reach,
He needs no lore I cannot teach,
His sleeping face is calm.

But oh, my boy! my bonny boy!
The gold of life hath base alloy,
And stains the grasping hand;
I cleanse thy baby palm to-day,
But years may part us far away
By miles of sea and land.

And thou may'st gather in thine haste
Life's golden flowers, to droop and waste;
Or soil thy spirit white
With dust and dross of garish ways,
With thirst for gold, and greed of praise,
With worldly, base delight.

But soft! he wakes, my little son,
And I with mother's doubt have done.
Joy wears my baby's smile;
And well I know that God above
Will hallow son's and mother's love
Beyond earth's little while!

BUY A BROOM?

THE Eaton of Warwickshire lies lowly
in that loamy Trent Valley which is
moist and misty with marl-set sewer-
courses, with coated pools, with soft and
silent coal-carrying canals, or "cootins."

It is in a doze, seemingly. And the sober
old settlement is passed by, always, by all,
as significant of nothing; as sided and
shunted off, right out of the stream of
success and aspiration; as shorn even of
the superficiality of picturesqueness; as
symbolic only of centuries of insipidity, and
sad-coloured and not over-savoury seclusion.

Well, and so it is. With which much,
this sketch might be done. The few
strokes that have set it in, though, may
be stigmatised as having been taken from
only one aspect; from the south, in the
soaking autumn; with the sun gone down.
For which reason, the cluster of sleepy home-
steads shall be skirted; we will look at
things from a new point of view; we will
try the influence of a different hour, when
fair play shall be given to a new outline,
and new colouring, from this other side.

Ah yes, things are changed now, dis-
tinctly. As the town lies grouped, here is
a thin line striking out from the widish
base of it, as a mast strikes up at right
angles from a grounded hull; here is a
thin offshoot, or limb, mounting itself up
upon all that the place has of the hill sort
to give it change and variety, getting
called by Warwickshire tongues "Oop th'
Aabbey Stree-ut;" and it speaks so vividly
of Shakespeare, so vividly of Shakespeare's
haunts, and times, and country halts and
stopping-places, it can never shift itself out
of the memory, let it be once properly
received and imbedded there. Look at this,
also—here—this little, squat, overhanging
corner of the old town; this little
crumbling nook, with drooping gables,
with aslant walls, with oblong, stooping,
too infrequent windows, forming, as it
nearly topples over, a short pass out of the
oval opening that is the sunny "Maarket-
plaaace." It is "th' Aabbey Gay-ut," being
here, naturally, before turning to tread
"oop th' Aabbey Stree-ut;" and it goes
behind Shakespeare, far; it goes behind
any of the Tudors; behind Crookback,
even; behind Bolingbroke; as far behind,
possibly, as John. Pass through it, too;
be really on the pebbled footway that
edges the thin outrunning slant, or line,
alluded to, and there can be observation of
many features that bring interest besides.
One comes from the oddness of variety;
from the fact that the street, though mainly
made up of quaint, ruddy, casemented,
timber-framed old dwelling-places, has
these mingled in and quite intimately
looped and dovetailed with speckled and
stone-dressed habitations of modern sight-

liness and fashion. Then, little more than one house deep, on this chosen side, the Abbey Street remains little more than one house deep, anywhere along it, up to the end. Mostly, too, its doors are "Oop th' Entry," alias up the side-way openings which now and again break the brick-work as high as a man's arm can reach, but which do not break it along its low and continuous front. To pave these openings, also, there is brick-work still; brick-work that "sweats," or is absolutely flooded, according to whether the morning's "swill" is recent, or is a few hours away; and turn through any of these entries the choice falls on, to go the "Baack waay," with the wish to have different sights to see, and there are green meadows here, there are green meadows there, close at hand. We can note the moss-grown fruit-tree trunks, the moss-grown "gaarden paaths," the moss-grown and quite rough-split and untooled "gaarden palins," of the street-folk's every-day resort and serving. There is the rain-water "bootts," moss-grown also, the moss-grown hovels, and "caasks," and "boockets," and lean-to's, that belong to the street-folks working and inner lives; and yet there is no stop and severance, there is nothing to bind in and parcel off the whole, from the pastures, and the crofts, and the ploughed and fattening "yacres" that spread into miles of refreshing landscape, and make up the surface of the wooded and poetic county.

Give thought to that name, written up now and again in neat blue enamel—The Abbey Street. There really was an abbey, at one time up there, about a quarter of a mile away. Some French Benedictine nuns came over to England, and to Warwickshire, about the year 1200, the Countess of Leicester, as their abbess, at their head; and when fourteenth century Eaton men, and fifteenth century Eaton men were felling trees, and splitting trees, and tarring the planks they had split, and baking crimson clay into bricks to erect these ruddy dwellings here and about what is now the Abbey Street—when fourteenth century Eaton men and fifteenth century Eaton men were rearing these homes, and thatching them, and rafting them, and fitting them up with wide hearths and stiff and sturdy settles; they were taking them one by one, and one by one, farther up the slope they had themselves to mount, to get to the church, and the shrines, and the sanctuary, to get to the cloisters, and cells,

and burial-place of these ladies. The nuns were aware of the advantages of government and administration; they knew all of the wisdom of accepting—or exacting—fees. The nuns were, indeed, the sole recipients, over all the district, of tithes and fair dues, of water tolls and market-pence; the sole owners of lands and dwellings, and vast belts and sweeps of growing timber; the nuns had become, in short, so loaded with transfer, and grant, and hereditament, and authority, that the very town, Eaton, had to be called Nun Eaton, as well in token of their possession of its rule and revenues, as to distinguish it from other Eatons studded about elsewhere; and it can be understood how, since it was compulsory to pay the cost of the good ladies, it was wise to creep up almost into their shadow, for the sake of the benefits obtainable from their good sanctity, and their accommodating institutions. This is all over now, of course. When Henry suppressed the monasteries, he suppressed the five-and-twenty sisters, up there behind the high grey walls of Nun Eaton Abbey, the same. They were not belonging to Continental families then. That was because they had been there for three centuries; and the gaps in their ranks had been filled, from time to time, by ladies owning names owned in Warwickshire to this day. As to their Christian-names, an Amice was among them that year that the bluff king made them go back ignominiously into nothing, relinquishing their substantial inheritance of public homage and command; there were some Joans; a Luce; a Joice or two; there were the Maries and Margarets of familiar occurrence still. As to the royal payments they were—promised—to have, in compensation for their summary ejection, the abbess was to receive sixty pounds a year—equalling some considerable hundreds to-day; the sisters were to have six marks a year—worth now about thirty pounds—and five marks, or four marks, and two; each one according to each one's grade. As to the Deed of Surrender they were to sign—it is barely half a yard square; it has not even that limited amount of space altogether covered with its innocent-looking, neatly-written Latin lines—when the nuns had to sit themselves down before that, the parchment spread out in front of them, the last document that would come to them, as nuns, collectively, they took the pen

between their fingers, and made crosses, in a long neat row; either because of inability or because each refused to write her name. Then the nuns retreated into some of these timber-framed old domiciles which are to be seen now; they retired into the humility of pensionership, and of pensionership, very possibly, in which the pensions were only spasmodically paid; and, almost within their touch, their refectories were ransacked, their dormitories were swept away, their finely-traced oriels, and sculptured capitals, and roofs, and arches, were hurled in fragments to the ground; and were it not that a name is left there would have been as utter an effacement of the fact of the nuns' proprietorship as there is of the echo of their chanted Pater Nosters and Ave Marias, and the whole page of history on which they figured would be closed and gone.

It is not too long, this, by one word. It is not too much of a preamble. Because, treading up this Abbey Street, and coming face to face with a brave old brush and broom maker and his stalwart son, walking leisurely by the side of their little half-a-yard-high cart, there is so early a bit of midland tradesmanship and handicraft experience to look at, it seems needful to show the early characteristics it occurs amongst, as a proper setting.

"Aah," comes, too, from the good man, in answer to the salutation given to him and to an enquiry—that "aah" that must have been inevitable for centuries at "Nooneaton;"—"I'm goo-in' t' Inckley—they scroobers is in the caart as ye spoke for—me and Saam here; but m' oother soon's are to work t' same, so ye're free to goo oop, and they'll make ye free. Moi missis'll be about; she'll show ye."

Going, also, into the little brush-and-broom shop, with a giant carpet-brush projecting over the door as primitive sign and indication, and standing there, too, under its close head-room, with the closeness of it made closer by "scroobers," and "doosters," and "scourers" hanging down from it in tufts, in bushes, in bunches, in straight orderly rows; it is mediævalism in association and sentiment and direct picturing, just as much as it is mediævalism outside, from eave to causeway, from the most stately glade to the smallest purlieu.

And "Aah," says the good "missis," in echo of her husband, and in echo of old times, as she comes straight from her kitchen-work out of the kitchen to give smiling greeting. "Summut strook me

ye'd coom. For the soon's ha' been a bit longer over the scroobers than I thought they'd be; and it seemed 'twere loikely ye'd take a turn oop t' ask. Folks mostly cooms for things when they wants un. Here's this haalf-dozen, now, o' short brooshes, here. They's been bespoke a toime. Yet we keep un; for there's no carl to send un out, hurried. They're for the Roifles, to roob oop their boottons just; and the Roifles ha'n't been out a whoile lately, so ha'n't been trooblin' to get the brooshin done. And why should they put theyselves about, or we eth-er?"

It was commerce that never could have been excelled in primitiveness since the currency of coin took the place of barter. Husband and sons manufactured; the wife and mother sold. If "arders" were to be carried to another town, then, on such another town's market-day, the husband (or "t' maaster," as the "Nooneaton" word is) took those "arders," took more stock judiciously selected, and, taking a "laad" with him to help, arranged for a stand in the market-place of the town he was bound for. To press wares—either here "oop th' Abbey Stree-ut," or "t' Inckley" whither "t' maaster" was stolidly jogging on—had not yet begun to enter the mind. Was there not a given population, so could there be wanted more than a given quantity of brooms?

"An' are ye lookin' round at these oothers?" the shop-mistress is saying. "Aah; there's a'most kind here as is used. Here's wax-brooshes for oak-floors; there's a many on un about, in the town, and round. Here's scroobers, wi' steels in un, to gi' un stren'th. Here's horse-brooshes, made o' whisk; aah, whisk as cooms fro' foreign paarts. Here's brooshes we made for a brick-yard, to put the ile on. Here's whitewash-brooshes, tar-brooshes, grate-brooshes, range-brooshes, flue-brooshes. Here's barrel-scourers, and parlour-a'th brooshes, and picture-doosters, and bannister-doosters, and double bannister-doosters, and sweepin'-brooms, and carpet-brooms, arl."

She was touching each one as she spoke, all being well within arm's length, and nearly as if, in very coarse and rough mimicry, the brooms were broom indeed—a brush-wood that overhung, and sprouted up, making passage difficult without a catch from twig or bough, without having to stoop and step adroitly, for avoidance. But here is what is neither stalk nor

blossom ; is what could neither be used to give a polish, or sweep off usage, from stair, or ceiling, or wall, or shoe. It is a bunch of funny little balls, or half balls, each on a handle, and all strung together ; here, in this corner, on a nail.

"Why, they ?" cries the good woman ; "they's stocks—round ile stocks, we call un. Well, then, stoumps, if ye like ; the same as these here is staffs for sweepin'-brooms. There must be a stock and a stave for a'most every broosh you see. There must be a stock, whatever ; that paart the hairs is stock in. An' then we carls some set-work, and some drawn-work, according to the kind. But go oop straight, and ye'll see. Aah ; go outside, and oop th' entry. The first entry, an' the first steer. It'll be a bit arkward for ye at top ; more a laader loike ; but if ye're afraid for yer footin', ha' a moind to yer hands as well. They'll help."

Yes, and help was wanted. For the stair was of bald chipped brick ; and it was steep, and narrow, and high-stepped, capable of baring the shin bone barbarously if there were a stumble on it ; and it would have been dark and very provocative of such stumbling, except for the light that came through a round hole left in the outer wall. And let the round hole have a look given to it, and through it, as it is passed by. It was set in, with admirable brick-work, by Tudor craftsmen who knew their craft, and honestly gave their knowledge play ; and when ruffed necks, and faces with peaked beards, were protruded through it, either when these craftsmen were about it with mortar and trowel, or when, completed and seasoned, it was answering the good purpose it is answering now, there were those "quarries" there, that the stair rises from, with the same characteristics that they have still ; there was the sun casting light and shade upon that effective edge-way course of eave-bricking across that side, just as it is being prettily cast to-day. Down there, possibly in that cottage, where a hand riband-loom is still being worked with its sharp click-click, there might have been some dispossessed nuns sunning themselves in their far old age, and being soothed by courtesy or disconcerted by a jeer ; and down there, in that inn-yard, even the queen's players themselves might have been strutting as they were passing to or back from Kenilworth hard by, whilst ostlers were open-eyed from their "brooshin'," and "scroobin'," and "roobbin'."

But reverie must end. Here is a blast of wintry air coming through the open hole. It reminds that discomfort was part and parcel of mediæval picturesqueness ; that it is well the mass of Nuneaton stairways have come to have their lightings framed and glazed.

Now we have to pass through a rough plank door, on the other side of which the "steer" really becomes a ladder ; a ladder, too, that must be mounted to get into the brush and broom work-loft there above, openly to be seen, through a long slim cut in its near floor.

Once up, see the Tudoresqueness, for a reward, that is here, that is there, that is everywhere, delightfully. A rafted roof, of course ; flat (unembrasured, that is, without incident or projection ; merely so many feet bored out of the wall), narrow, tiny-paned windows—a long stretch of them, nearly the length of the loft—some upright bricks mortared in, a fender always there ; a slim, oblong, plain brick fire-place ; grate bars going up, as flames go up, and wrought a little zig-zag, as flames are conventionally represented zig-zag, instead of across ; the grate white with the ash, and orange with the dying glow of an untended midland coal fire ; bare brick walls ; rough staples battered into these, and great barbed nails to sling and to string things in and on to, in default—as there is default—of shelf or cupboard for careful keeping, and for the reason that the things are of the sort it is not well to have lying about—as much is actually let to lie about—in heaps, in bundles, in a thin strewing over all the floor.

It is clear that to manufacture brushes now, up here in this sunny garret, must be precisely what it was to manufacture brushes in the best days of the Benedictine nuns. It makes it clear that to exactly such a place the nuns might have sent their orders prodigally, wishing, as they would, to have their butteries, pantries, laundries, their audit-chamber, and the rest, scoured to the whiteness of new snow, their fine metal-work "roobed" to a polish as noticeable as if it had been gold. For look at the quaint saddle-looking stools for the men to sit on ! They are just raw from the tree ; they are mere planes, or platters, of untouched oak, with the tree's jagged edge left there, with the tree's warped face, with the mark of no tool upon any of them but the saw that sliced each away from the whole ; yet they have been sat on for so many generations

(wearing out legs and getting replenishment that way only); they have had usage, back and back, during so many reigns, that their knots and grains are smoothed up and browned by the mere sitting to as fine a surface as if it had been put there by the long labour of skilful hands. Look at the quaint giant pitch-pot and quaint iron canopy suspended over it to concentrate its heat. It has the most primitive flue-tubing to carry its fumes to an outlet in the roof; it is a huge flat chafing-dish, say—as “early” a receptacle as can be thought of—keeping the thick black compound blistering in it, hot for constant use. It differs in nothing from the pitch-pot of 1500 except that charcoal would have been burning under that, and that this has to submit to a ring of gas. Then look at the “cloomp” stocks and plain stocks hanging from this pike-headed nail here, waiting till they are required. They are just the semi-circular backs (if they are “cloomped”) or the straight backs (if they are plain) that will get metamorphosed, by addition, into long brooms; just those bristle-holding parts into which long stales, or staves, will be set; and they are no smoother or more perfect than the stocks of the broom-staffs with which “the youths that thunder at a play-house and fight for bitten apples” defied the porter’s man at Elizabeth’s christening, no better turned and scored than the stock of the besom that Jack Cade compared himself to, when he vowed he was appointed to sweep the court clean. “Myn hous . . . clensid out with besyms and maad fair,” says Wiclif in his Version; and Wiclif (Lutterworth, his living, is but a few miles away) could have looked at just such stales, and staves, and stocks, and style of working, and could have had them in his mind when he reverently felt the meaning of the words, and wrote the words down.

Look that my staves be sound, and not too heavy,

was Richard’s cry at Market Bosworth (King Dickon, he is called there to this day; and again it is only in the neighbouring county); and here are staves that would match those he wanted. “A dozen crab-tree staves, and strong ones,” says the porter; here are staves that would have served either of them, in a fray, for halberds and for truncheons, although they are the staves that will be put to use now by housewives, serving-men, “varlets,” and many a Warwick wench, as soon as “th’

oother soon’s” of the brave “maaster,” and the work-mate helping, shall have laid them out of hand as finished, and the “missis” below stairs shall have received them in her charge to sell.

Do not let the attention be withdrawn yet, either. Here are, besides these “stooks” and “stay-els,” the backs of all sorts of small brushes—straight, oblong pieces of wood first, that are having their face-holes drilled into them rapidly, in oblong rows, that are having these holes filled in as rapidly, with wool, with bristle, with whisk, and fixed in with wire (which is “drawing”), or fixed in with pitch (which is “setting”) according to the kind. Here are the backs of brushes that will have outer backs glued on to them (to conceal and preserve the “drawing”) if they are of that sort; that will, any way, have their edges neatly rounded, and bevelled, and grooved, to make them “eye-able,” that will be scraped with glass, and powdered with chalk, and trimmed up into their utmost condition of this commercial “eye-ableness,” by means of strong scissors that will give their bristles a finishing clip. Here are these backs, of ash, of birch, of beech, of alder, of sycamore, of oak. Here are these bristles—or let them be called, as a general term, hair—of Mexican fibre, of cocoa-fibre, of bass from the Brazils—

“A boondle o’ baass weighs, may-be, aboov fourteen pound,” says one of the “soon’s.”

—of “Chinee ‘air,” of Siberian hair, of “Roossia” bristles, of hemp.

“This is coarse ‘emp,” puts in the “soon” again, “and that’s foine. Coarse ‘emp’s used for middle ‘oles,’ ‘cause they’re laarger; foine ‘emp’s for the outsoide.”

“And here’s roiflins,” came, in addition; “what we carl roiflins; dressed oop, ye know, fro’ Roossia. An’ we have them three inches an’ a quaafter, three an’ a haalf, an’ four, an’ four an’ a quaafter, an’ five an’ a haalf long. But there’s a soight o’ wool in the ‘air, sometime’s; maybe it’s about three-paarts waste.”

Three-parts, truly, judging by the growing heap at the “soon’s” right hand, as he drew tufts of the hair through a comb, or crib, deftly, and as all that came away was rejected, and the tufts that were retained became finer and much finer, and glossier and much glossier, becoming silky enough at last to be used as a painter’s brush. “Dragging” is the name of this process—a process as old (well-nigh) as the world, the dragger sitting at a little wooden shelf

or table in the bright light, and explaining, as his hands kept at their work, how there would be a gathering up of the waste again, and a second combing of it, with a third combing, and perhaps a fourth, since waste was waste (for the most part) only technically, and nearly all of it would be utilised for coarser ware.

Here—for the word still is Circumspice—are hand-screws, to screw the layers of brush-backs together after they have been glued, till they are dry and firm; here are size-sticks, and awls, and gouges.

"A googe is what we oller the soides o' the shoe-brooshes with," said a "soon." He was twin to a third one, and the two of them were a pair of whom any mother might be proud. "An' may'ap I can shaarpen the pencil wi' it," is added extra civilly. "I heard it goo, an' it's 'andier than a knoife."

Here are spokeshaves, to finish spokeshaves; here are men tucking the thread they are going to twist round bristles into their apron-bands, for security; here are the men dipping their little knots, so strung, into the pitch to "set" them, and rubbing their hands about with chalk to brush all the pitch away; here are the men furnished with a square piece of wood across their chests.

"Well, we couldn't bore," says one of them with a smile, "if we didn't wear that breastplate."

Here is the mind getting full of broom, and brush, and bristle, and besom; getting astray to that broom (*genêt, genista*), immortal with the Plantagenets; to the tamarisk,

For housewives' besomes only known most good, (in Browne's Pastoral); to the Welsh phrase, "The dust before the broom," that pretty settling of a fine point of precedence that holds the essence of courtesy and humour. Here is the mind going off at a leap to

Where hags their cauldrons fraught with toads prepare,

Or glide on broomsticks through the midnight air.

Here is the mind, in short, going off so far and wandering, and yet becoming so concentrated and infused, it is best to go down the work-loft ladder, into the Abbey Street again, and to let the slide that was labelled "Nuneaton" be sharply shut away.

A SOUND INVESTMENT.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

"I MUST take it easy for a bit, Sammy," continued my cousin, striking a fusee, "for it is not only dry work talking so much,

but to go over all these arrangements again, and to recall the trouble we took, the pains and anxiety we endured, is quite painful. Ah me!—well, with some people trying is of no use; they never get on." Saying this, shaking his head, and sighing deeply, my cousin thoughtfully refilled his glass. Then, once more leaning back in the comfortable armchair, he watched the fumes of his cigar as they floated upwards.

"You will excuse my plain speaking, William," I said after a pause, "but I am very glad I do not know your friend Skeldon. He must have been nothing better than a swindler, and I am sorry you ever came across him."

"There is a good deal to be said on both sides," replied Anstream, rousing himself; "he looked at it in the light that it was one of the chances that an insurance office has to run. I considered it a very good chance for me, I know, and was glad to get hold of it. Considered in a purely business light, which of course was how we regarded it, it was undeniably a sound investment. But I will tell you how we proceeded. He—Skeldon, you know—found a place at once, three nice large rooms on the ground floor of a handsome cottage, in a village in the district he had mentioned. He chose the ground floor because Tobbs could not get up or down stairs. We were dreadfully anxious about his removal, as Skeldon thought he was going to die right out, on the day before we left London, but he bore the journey better than we expected; he took a glass of wine and a little jelly every half-hour, and that kept him up. I went down to see them, of course, and found Skeldon had got everything to rights; and the doctor called while I was there—a very pompous elderly party, who drove two horses, and was the don of the neighbourhood. Jem was wonderfully attentive to Tobbs, who told us both that he felt our kindness very much, and though he knew nothing would make any real alteration in him, yet his few remaining days would be soothed by our generosity—in fact, he almost drew tears from my eyes, and I believe I saw a twinkling in Jem's as well. Soon after this visit, Jem sent for more money, as I expected he would, for the expenses in the removal had been heavy, and would continue to be so, for not only were the doctor's visits a serious addition to our charges, but it was desirable to be somewhat ostentatious in our orders of the most tempting delicacies for the patient, who really had a most remarkable appetite.

I envied him, for I was rather out of sorts at the time. To see him eat a couple of new-laid eggs, which were dear articles in November, with a slice of boiled ham for his breakfast, and a whole chicken for dinner on the same day, as I have seen him do, would have surprised you as much as it did me, to guess how such a poor scarecrow could digest such meals. He managed it somehow; his liquors helped, perhaps, for he took a pint of port and two large bottles of stout every day, and always required a glass of brandy-and-water the last thing at night, to give tone to his shattered nerves. But as he said, with a bitter groan, it was not for long, so we did not mind it. Well, Sam, it was a very trying winter, as you no doubt remember—the winter before last."

"I do," I said, in answer to this appeal; "it was one of the worst I have ever known."

"It was," said Anstream emphatically; "I know I caught a bad cold then, which laid me up for several weeks, and the doctor would not let me go out of doors for several weeks more, after I grew better, so that I was in an awkward position myself, and my expenses were alarming. So were our patient's, for Jem could never make his money last. Tobbs was always wanting something fresh and delicate to tempt his appetite—I wished at the time that mine had been only half as good without any tempting, but as it was, I did not feel justified in ordering for myself the luxuries which Tobbs was obliged to have for his daily fare. He appeared to grow more and more extravagant in his living, and so much in excess of our estimate were the expenses, and so frequent were Skeldon's applications for money, that by the time I grew well, my money was all gone, and the second premium was nearly due—the notice had been sent in by the office to the new address of Mr. Absalom Watts. There was nothing to be done, as Jem had no money, but to go to my solicitor again, and raise a second loan—two hundred more. This was easily enough done, a precious sight too easily, but I was sorry to have to do it, for it was just repeating the process by which the other houses had slipped out of my hands. When I obtained the advance, I wrote to Skeldon, telling him I was ready to pay the premium, and would run down on a certain day to see him, being the first visit I had paid him for a long time. When I got out at Staines station I saw Skeldon waiting on the platform, and

was struck at the alteration in him. He was generally a rollicking, careless-looking fellow, with an air as if nothing ever troubled him; but he was now haggard, worn, and jaded in his appearance, with dark hollows under his eyes such as I had never seen there before. He shook my hand warmly, then hurriedly said: 'I am so glad you have come, old fellow—and glad to see you looking none the worse for having been unwell so long.' 'I am getting all right,' I said; 'but you seem anything but bright.' 'My dear fellow!' he exclaimed, 'I have had an awful time of it, especially the last three or four days. No, don't call a fly; a walk will do me good. He was lying down asleep when I came away, and Mrs. Pye, our landlady, said she would sit by him.' 'Tobbs was asleep, I suppose?' I said. 'Yes,' replied Jem, 'it's nearly up now, he can't last many days, poor chap, perhaps not many hours.' 'I hope he won't—' I began, but recollected how selfish what I was going to say would sound, and stopped short. 'It's impossible to say,' said Skeldon, shaking his head seriously, for he knew what I meant; 'I have been up with him for three nights running, he sleeps in the afternoon, being quite worn out, poor fellow! but last night was the worst. Mrs. Pye sat up through the night, as well, and two or three times we thought it was all over, but he rallied a little before breakfast.' 'Does he—does he eat as much as ever?' I asked, although I hardly liked to do so, lest it might seem that I grudged him his food. 'Yes,' said Skeldon emphatically, 'he does, and that is the strangest part of it. Why, this morning, after such a night, he had, at seven o'clock, two new-laid eggs beaten up in half a tumbler of sherry, and a slice of toast; at eight he had some potted game, a plate of cold ham, and three half-pint cups of chocolate, besides two rounds of toast. He had two glasses of port and some cheese-cakes at eleven, while for dinner he has eaten nearly the whole of a spring chicken, a sole, and a jam-tart which Mrs. Pye made, besides drinking a large bottle of ale, with a thimbleful of brandy for his nerves. After that he said he felt tired out, and thought he could sleep.' 'Umph!' I said, 'I don't wonder at it; a good many people in sound health could sleep after such an absolute gorge. It is very extraordinary. What does the doctor say?' 'Oh, he says it is a most interesting case,' replied Jem; 'he fears there is no chance of any permanent improvement,

and the wonder is how Mr. Watts, as he calls him, can hold on. I am glad you have made it all right about the premium; it is the last expense of that kind we shall be put to. Hush! let us go in very gently.' I complied, and Mrs. Pye, hearing us enter, came on tiptoe from the back parlour, which was Tobbs's bedroom, and told us in a whisper that he was still sleeping quite comfortably, 'poor dear gentleman,' and she hoped it would do him good. So we sat and talked in whispers, being afraid to smoke for fear the fumes should get into the bedroom, and disturb the patient—not that he objected to smoking when awake, in fact he said it was good for him, and so smoked on an average three cigars a day. It appeared there was only one kind of cigar which suited his complaint, and these were only to be obtained at one particular shop. We used to send down a bundle every week, twenty-one for ten shillings; you got one in by buying a bundle, which, as he said, made it come cheaper. I smoked tobacco at fourpence an ounce, but then I was not in a decline. Mrs. Pye and the servant got our tea in silence and on tiptoe, and we drank it in the same funeral fashion, until we heard her speak in a low tone to the patient, and then followed a fit of coughing, of the hollow sepulchral kind I recalled so well; then we heard groaning and gasping, with Mrs. Pye's voice speaking in a soothing tone to the sufferer. 'We shall have another night of it, I am afraid,' said Jem, speaking with something like a groan on his part; 'that is just how he begins. Come in and see him.' I followed Skeldon, and not having seen Tobbs for a long time, I recoiled with horror at the ghastly spectacle he presented. I have described him before, so it is of no use my telling you over again how he looked. He seemed, as before, very pleased to see me, and again and again thanked me for my kindness in coming to see him, and for the care with which he had been treated. I checked him, as I saw how it distressed him to speak, but he insisted upon going on. It was probably the last opportunity he should have, he said; I could see what a wreck he was, and although he had, by a miracle, got through the winter, yet he knew, only too well, what was before him. Mrs. Pye was forced two or three times to give him small quantities of brandy while he was speaking, to keep him from fainting, and although I was pleased to hear him so grateful and satisfied with his treatment, I

was relieved when it was time for me to return, and I felt heartily glad to think that to Skeldon's share fell the task of living with and watching him. No amount of money could have compensated me for such an ordeal. Speaking of money here, reminds me that I had to give rather a large sum to Jem on this occasion, as he had run a little into debt with Mrs. Pye; so when I had done this, had paid nigh upon seventy pounds for the premium, and had cleared up at my own lodgings, there was not a great deal left of my second advance, and despite the pity I felt for Tobbs while in his presence, I could not avoid a very natural hope that the poor fellow would soon be released from his sufferings. That was the way I tried to put it in my meditations, Sammy, but in reality I was frightened at the awful outlay. Well, I won't bother you with all the details, but a good while before the next premium became due——"

"He lived through the summer, then?" I said, rather astonished, for I had expected to hear of the patient's demise long before.

"He did, sir," said my cousin; he had a way of saying "sir," to me, or to anyone, when he wished to be particularly emphatic. "He did, sir; I got two hundred in the spring as I tell you, and but for a little stroke of luck turning up just then, I could not have held out through the summer. I contrived to clear a hundred and twenty pounds over the Goodwood Stakes, which was about my only speculation that season, for I had been obliged to drop betting—but for this, I say, I could not have made the advance hold out. However, I managed to pay the next premium, which brought us to October, so that Mr. Absalom Watts, you see, had lived all through the spring and summer, and was about to face another winter. He did not seem materially to mend during the fine weather, nor could we see that he was any worse; the only change was that he now took more exercise, drove out five or six miles once or twice a week in a fly, and that, again, was an expense. It was pretty clear that unless his complaint took a sudden turn, I should be obliged to raise some more money, and the idea of doing so made me low-spirited, for I began to think I should never see the end of it. So heavy were Jem's demands, that I was obliged to tell him I could not stand them; that Tobbs must be content with plainer living, as in the way he was going on, it would be cheaper to board a dozen navvies than him alone, and he must draw

his horns in. Two days after this message, I got a telegram from Skeldon, urgently requesting me to go down at once, as Mr. Watts was dying—you may guess I went pretty sharply, Sam, and, I must confess it, in the best spirits I had known for many a day. I shall not stay to tell you how he looked, and all that, because I want to get to the end of my story, but Skeldon opened the door for me, having been watching for my arrival, and said in a whisper: 'Hush! he has just dozed off—he has rallied a little this morning'—I could not avoid giving a groan here, Sammy, I could not, indeed. Hang me! if I had not expected as much—'but he has been worse than ever,' said Skeldon. 'Mrs. Pye feels sure he cannot last the week.' 'Confound Mrs. Pye and her opinions,' I retorted; 'all this is what we have heard before. What does the doctor say?' 'The doctor says it is a most interesting case,' answered Skeldon, but I recollected that Dr. Blump had said that before. Jem went on to tell me that he had mentioned to Tobbs my desire that he should moderate his expenses, and the poor fellow had at once agreed. 'Barley-water and dry toast are enough for me, Mr. Skeldon,' he said, and he would not touch anything all day. At night,' continued Jem, 'his attack came on, and every one in the house was kept up until the morning. So I insisted upon his resuming his nourishing diet, because we don't want to kill the man, although we do want the money. You would not like to have it on your mind, Bill, that you had shortened his days by privation, to get that policy, I know; for it would be murder, disguise it as much as you liked.' I was obliged to own that this was true, so I had a look at the spectre who was asleep on the sofa, and then left, having almost determined I would never see him again, come what might, his aspect was so awful. I was compelled once more to go to my solicitor, and once more to raise two hundred pounds; I knew he was good for pretty well eight hundred, but if I wanted more, I should have to sell the houses. Luckily, as I thought, I just then had an offer of work for two or three months with a friend who had a contract at a Spanish city, in building the warehouses for a railway, and I accepted it, being very glad, I can tell you, to get the chance. I went out at the end of December, and when I had paid the expenses on Tobbs's account up to this time, and left Jem fifty pounds in hand, rather more than a hundred and twenty out of my new advance had

gone, leaving barely enough for the next premium."

"You did steam away, William," I said, while he paused, a little overcome by his feelings, to take a draught of whisky-and-water.

"Steam away! I should think we did; it was awful!" returned Anstream with a deep sigh. "Well, Sam, I went out, and thought that anyhow it would be all over before I got back, and that as I should be keeping myself, our expenses would be certainly so much less. If I had more time I would tell you several rather odd adventures which happened to me in Spain, but they had, of course, nothing to do with our business speculation in England, so I pass them over. At last I one day got a telegram, it was almost on the eve of my starting to come home—I had been there ten or eleven weeks, and on the fourth day from this I was to sail. I am not more unfeeling than other people, Sam, but I must own my heart throbbed with hope and exultation as I opened this long-expected missive. It was from Skeldon, as I had supposed, and said—but here it is, in my pocket; I will read it: 'Send money at once, funds and credit exhausted. Important.' This was the first communication I had received, as I had desired him not to trouble me with weekly bulletins, which had previously been our practice. I wanted to rest a bit, and this is how I was stirred up at last. I had saved about twenty-five pounds, and as there was no help for it, I got my friend to telegraph to his London agents to pay Mr. James Skeldon that amount, while I telegraphed to Jem to the same effect. So there was nearly three months of hard work gone for nothing; the result of the greatest economy and pinching I had ever practised, gone in a minute; and, so far as I knew, we were no nearer filling the sieve into which I had been pouring my gold, than we had been a year before."

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER another pause, filled up by smoking thoughtfully, my cousin resumed.

"By the time I got home, there was the notice in from the insurance office, and I had to pay the premium, which left me without a feather to fly with, while to make things more cheerful, I found at my lodgings two letters from Skeldon; one written to acknowledge the twenty-five pounds, and another written subsequently, but both almost filled with complaints, and the

second contained a request for additional funds; the only comfort in the matter, Jem said, was that it could not last very long now, as Tobbs was suffering fearfully. Suffering fearfully, was he? Well, so was I, and I suffered still more in being obliged at once to go to my lawyer, and raise the last possible amount, one hundred and fifty pounds, that he was willing to lend me. The head clerk, with whom I transacted most of the business, a careful old fellow he was, said, 'It's no concern of mine, Mr. Anstream, of course, but having known your poor mother, and having known you from a child, you will excuse me if I say I hope all these advances and sales are for real business purposes.' I assured him that I was engaged in a speculation which promised large profits, but required rather more capital than I had anticipated, which answer, Sammy, you must own was strictly true. I sent the money to Skeldon, and when he wrote in return, he said he wished I would go down oftener, as he felt it very trying to be there by himself; but I did not go down for some weeks, not, indeed, until he wrote for more money.

I shall always remember the day of that visit; it was a lovely afternoon towards the end of May; every tree, hedgerow, and field was in its brightest green, and blossoms were hanging everywhere; the birds were twittering on every bough, and every cottage roof; the sun was shining brilliantly, so, as I walked through the quiet roads from the station, and drew in the balmy air, or lingered at each turn of the road to admire the soft beauty of the country, I thought that I would almost consent to be the invalid myself, to live in so peaceful a spot; especially as, so far as I could judge, he was having considerably the best of it. In my letter to Jem, wherein I had again murmured strongly at the expenses, I had told him by what train I should travel, and that I should walk in, so expected he would meet me; but he did not make his appearance until I was just entering the village, and then I saw him lying on a bank by the roadside, smoking. As I drew near, he rose slowly, and I was again pained to see how ill he was looking; his whole air was that of a worn-out dejected man, of one used up, physically and mentally. He did not brighten up and meet me with a smile, as was his wont, so I said, 'What is the matter with you, old fellow?' 'Bill,' said he seriously, 'I shall chuck this up. I have had about enough of it.' 'Enough of——' I began. 'Enough of this precious

Tobbs,' continued he; 'I have not been in bed for three nights running. I am blest if I don't believe he keeps us up on purpose. He can sleep like a pig every afternoon. I can't, and it's killing me.' 'How does he seem now?' I asked. 'Oh, I'm hanged if I know,' retorted Skeldon quite snappishly; 'he does not seem to get any worse or any better, and here have I been at a job which must be a good deal worse than slavery, for the best part of two years. Talk about the policy! I'm hanged if I would go through it all again for half-a-dozen of 'em. You will have to get someone else, Bill, and you may bag the whole of the money for yourselves, when you get it. I'm off, as soon as you can get suited.' 'But look at all the money he has cost me,' I said, thoroughly staggered at hearing such language as this; 'I have spent about seven hundred pounds in following this speculation. Do you see any change in him at all—does he eat and drink as much as ever?' 'Eat and drink!' exclaimed Jem, who seemed perfectly exasperated at the question. 'Eat and drink! I am confident that Daniel Lambert in his best days was a baby to him. Confound it, sir! think of a man after such a night as he has had—only kept alive, Mrs. Pye says, by half a pint of brandy in small glasses at a time, and two shillings' worth of jelly—imagine that man, I say, that you saw at death's door at two o'clock, eating nearly a pound of rump-steak, a little under-done, with mushrooms, for his breakfast at eight! Yes, sir; then after a tolerable lunch, with two glasses of sherry, he had a slice of salmon, followed by veal cutlet, ham, and lamb-chops with peas, for dinner; finishing up with apricot tart. It's awful! it's maddening! I shall chuck it up. I have heard you talk of going abroad with the money when you get it; well, when you do, send me a fifty-pound note for myself, and I will emigrate somewhere, too. Not one instant's rest, or comfort, or peace, have I had since I hooked myself to this detestable cormorant!' Jem had worked himself up into quite a passion by the time we arrived at the house, but I could not rouse my spirits sufficiently even for that; I grew more depressed, the more thoroughly in earnest he seemed. As we reached the house the door opened, and a gentleman came out; it was the doctor, and Jem said bitterly: 'You had better walk a little way with Doctor Blump, and see if you can make anything of him—I can't.' I really thought this was not bad advice, so I spoke

to the doctor—who knew me of course, as I had seen him several times—and asked him if I should be intruding if I walked a few yards with him. He was pleased at my request, and explaining that his carriage was waiting for him at the end of the village, invited me to accompany him in that direction. I thanked him and directly we left the garden made a direct enquiry as to the state of our poor friend, Mr. Absalom Watts—I could hardly get this out—did he think there was any chance of his lasting much longer. ‘Ahem!’ said the doctor, who had a round mellow voice which was very impressive; ‘I assure you, Mr.—A—A—Streamer,’ ‘Anstream,’ I corrected him. ‘Exactly; Lambstream,’ continued Dr. Blump, ‘I assure you that in Mr. Watts I have one of the most interesting cases of all that ever came under my care. His symptoms are such, that a crisis may be looked for at any time, yet on the other hand, his vitality is of so tenacious a character that there is no saying how long it may hold out.’ ‘But do you think, sir,’ I asked, ‘that his disease must necessarily have an early and fatal termination?’ ‘We will hope not,’ he replied, ‘but of course there is no certainty in these diseases Mr.—A—Screamson. It is one of the most interesting cases——’ From this point he went on as before, and so he did, let me vary my questions as I would, until we parted. I saw him into his carriage, and finding myself just opposite to The Coach and Horses, a very respectable house, went in to get a glass of ale and a biscuit, for I had had no dinner, and felt sure I could not enjoy anything with our patient close to me. The quiet old-fashioned parlour, with its Windsor chairs and plain mahogany tables, was empty, as I could see by the open door, so I took my modest refreshment in there, but was followed by a stranger, who also called for a glass of ale and a biscuit. He was a stout, red-faced man, very closely shaved, of about five-and-forty, or a little older; he caught my eye as I glanced at him, and at once nodded and said: ‘Fine afternoon, sir.’ I assented, and supposed our conversation was ended. In this idea I was much mistaken. ‘You will excuse me, sir,’ he continued, ‘but I think I saw you come out of Laurel Cottage?’—which was the name of our house, as I ought perhaps to have said before. ‘I thought so,’ he went on; ‘well, sir, I followed you to have a few words with you.’ You may guess how I stared at this, Sam, for I had never seen the man before in my life. He

continued: ‘You are partners in Tom Tobbs, with Mr. Skeldon, I believe,’ Sam, when I heard him say this, I felt that I could cheerfully have dropped into a well, or anywhere. I made sure he was a detective employed by the life assurance office, and I could not answer him. He thought my fixed helpless stare meant anger, so added, very civilly: ‘No offence, I hope, sir; but I came down to see Tobbs on business, and he tells me he is engaged to you two gents. You will excuse me, sir, but what’s your line, and are you open to an offer?’ I felt a little relieved here, Sam, for although I could not understand what he was talking about, or what on earth he was referring to, yet it was plain he was not a detective. ‘Line!’ I repeated. ‘An offer!’ ‘Exactly, sir,’ said the man. ‘I am going to work the north, so even if you are in the same line, we shall not clash if your beat is southerly. It is worth thinking of, if you don’t want him directly. My money is right,’ ‘My dear sir,’ I at last found breath to say, ‘I don’t know who you are, what your line is, or what you are talking about; and I am at an equal loss as to what you suppose my business is.’ ‘As for that, sir,’ said the man, laying a card on the table, ‘that’s me, sir—Professor Hildebrandt de la Crespigny, professionally; John Hookle, in private life. You have heard of me, of course?’ ‘I am sorry to say I have not, sir,’ I answered, reading the card, which appeared to be that of a professor of legerdemain, who was also the proprietor of a wax-work exhibition with which were combined monstrosities of various kinds. ‘Never heard of me, sir!’ he exclaimed. ‘Come, you are joking. But my time is short, for I must catch a train, having to meet the Three-legged Venus to-night, so just let us see if we can’t come to terms about old Tom. Here am I, Jack Hookle, with ready cash, if preferred. Are you going to show him? When are you going to show him? Where are you going to show him? There are the questions, and if answered suitable, will a pound a week satisfy you? Say thirty shillings besides his own screw, as I must own he is a safe draw.’ ‘I tell you what it is, Mr. Hookle,’ I said, with perhaps a trifle of sternness in my tone, as I regained confidence, and as he was growing rather a bore; ‘if you will speak plainly, I will answer you, but I am not going to show anybody, nor do I know why anyone should want to see Tobbs, and I can’t understand your language——’ ‘Why, what do you want to box up the finest living skeleton

in the business for a year and a half, if it isn't to bring him out under a fresh name?' said the horrible man. 'I worked him for two years—first as the Fasting Hermit of Patagonia; and then as the Living Skeleton from the Wilds of Siberia. Why! what's the matter, sir?' He might well ask me what was the matter just then, Sam, for I gave a deep groan, and my head fell forward on the table. My feelings were awful. I saw it all—the crash—the collapse—the utter smash—the swindle! With a great effort I rallied myself and said: 'I thought Tobbs was—was in a consumption, and I took pity on him, and——' 'Ha! ha! ha!—haw! haw! haw!—ho! ho! ho!—you'll excuse me,' gasped the stranger; 'but I—he! he! he!—it's too good. He in a consumption! Bless your soul, sir, he will last you and me out—though he can come the cough and spasm dodge splendidly. His father and mother are nearly as thin as he is, and they seem likely to live for ever; his brothers and sisters are much the same.' 'But he told me,' I interposed, 'that he had not a relative in the world; that he was born in India, and could not remember his father or mother.' 'Did he though?' said Mr. Hookle, in a tone of genuine admiration; 'did he really? What a clever chap he is! I always said Tom Tobbs ought to have been a lawyer.' 'I wish he had been anything, or anywhere,' said I, 'so that I had never seen him.' 'Did you ever see him eat, sir?' said Mr. Hookle. 'I hardly ever saw the fellow do anything else, except cough and groan,' I replied. 'He is awful at it, isn't he?' continued Mr. Hookle; 'his victuals do him no good, but the quantity he can eat is astonishing. We always used to allow him an equal quantity to what we three—self, wife, and son; all hearty people, sir—used to have, and then he grumbled. You have no doubt heard of the celebrated match where a man ate twenty-one pancakes for a wager? Well, Tobbs was the party. It was very properly considered a wonderful performance, but it is not generally known that he had eaten a pork-pie, and drunk a pot of ale, just before he commenced.' I uttered some strong ejaculations here; the speaker shook his head sympathetically, and went on: 'He does seem to have caught you alive, sir, I must own; yet I can't exactly see what you have kept him best part of two years for—however, that's no business of mine. You don't want to show him, you say, now I do—I really think you had better let him come with me.' 'I am sure we had,' I muttered,

'or with anyone else who will rid us of such a detestable vampire.' 'I will give you ten pounds to cancel his engagement from to-morrow,' said Mr. Hookle, 'will hand you over the notes at once.' 'He is yours,' I exclaimed, and eagerly took the proffered paper. 'Just write your name on the back,' said he, pushing The Coach and Horses' inkstand towards me; 'that's enough, sir, I know I can trust you. I shall call for him about twelve; can he come then?' 'He can. The sooner the better,' I replied. 'Right then!' exclaimed Mr. Hookle. 'By Jove! sir, my time is up. You will be sure to have him ready?' With this he was gone; and I, leaving my untasted ale and biscuit, quitted the tavern also, and crawled dejectedly to our cottage. Skeldon had been anxiously expecting my return, as he could not imagine what was keeping me so long with the doctor; he opened the door to me, and at once said: 'Tobbs is awake now; I think you had better speak quietly to him about making a change.' 'Confound him! I will speak to him about making a change!' I exclaimed. Then to Skeldon's surprise, and alarm as well, I fancy, I pushed by him and went straight into the room where the unprincipled scoundrel was lying on the sofa; he just began his hollow cough as I entered, but I understood all about that, now. 'Shut up!' I said; 'we don't want any more of your coughing here!' In an instant he ceased, and looked at me with such a cunning glitter in his eye, that it was plain he comprehended everything. 'None of your living skeleton tricks any longer,' said I, 'or your fasting hermit business.' 'Why! I haven't been doing any fasting business here, have I?' he exclaimed in an impudent tone, seeing that the game was up; 'don't bring that against me. Ask Mr. Skeldon if I have fasted.' Jem stood glaring first at one and then the other, too utterly amazed to speak. 'Your friend, Mr. Hookle, will come for you to-morrow,' I said, 'so you will clear out of this.' 'What! you have seen old Jack, then?' he exclaimed; 'I have met him once or twice myself lately, when Mr. Skeldon has been refreshing himself with a doze. Well, governor, the gaff is blown, I suppose; you don't want me any longer.' 'I don't, you swindler! you impostor!' I shouted, as I was more exasperated by the vulgar familiarity of his tone, than anything which had preceded it. 'What do you mean?' he retorted, in a changed, savage tone, 'what have I impostured in? Is it

because I am not ill enough? I never asked you to take me, you know. It was your very wideawake friend, Mr. Skeldon, who found me out, and would have me. However, we will part friends. I have enjoyed myself here, I must own, and have had a nice little rest, so I will take twenty pounds, which is liberal on my part, I think, and clear out as you propose.' 'Twenty pounds, you scoundrel!' I said; 'mind you don't get horsewhipped, or taken before a police-magistrate!' 'As for horsewhipping, old man,' said the villain coolly, 'I will fight either of you for a fiver this very day if you like. And as for the police-court—ha! ha! ha!—if you don't hand over the twenty pounds before I leave, I will ask for a hundred, and if you don't give me that pretty sharp, I will go to the Royal Cornhill Insurance Office, and tell them all your little game. Oh, you start at that, do you? You don't suppose I have been such a flat as not to spot what you were up to, in all this time; and when you talk of my being an impostor, I tell you, to your faces, you are a couple of swindlers trying to defraud the office out of Absalom Watts's policy money. Blow me! I have read you like two books, from the beginning of your game to the end. You thought to make a tool of me, but you will find you have been tools yourselves. Why, when you grumbled at the expenses, or the second idiot—he meant me, Sam—'was coming down to look me up, all I had to do was to groan and cough a little extra and you were ready to have given me gold to eat, if I could have done it, so delighted were you to see the policy money getting nearer.' Sam, it is too painful. Horrible as it will seem to you, we had to give that unprincipled wretch the twenty pounds, and he went off in a most insolent manner. He—who couldn't breathe except in gasps—danced a breakdown on the hearthrug to his own whistling; jumped clean into the open fly which came for him, right over the side like an acrobat, and went away singing at the top of his voice.

"It was all over with us, it nearly broke my heart, and so it did Skeldon's. We applied to the office to purchase the policy,

but as it had not been in force quite three years it was of no value, so we have burnt the thing. The last demand of that scoundrel Tobbs, and our clearing up expenses, left me without a penny; in fact I was something in debt, so I had no resource but to sell the houses. They are gone, and I am off to Queensland."

"And Skeldon?" said I.

"Oh, poor Jem!" replied my cousin; "he will never be the same man again, I believe. He has fortunately found employment; he is what they call a 'doorsman' or 'streetman' to a cheap photographer. It is only sixteen shillings a week, but it is better than nothing. I could not have thought there was so much wickedness and deceit in the world; would you have believed it, Sam?"

I told him with perfect truth I should not have supposed it, and that I had never heard a story so full of such dishonest trickery. He was relieved by my sympathy, and took more whisky-and-water than was good for him, to soothe his disturbed mind. He sailed on the next day but one, as he said, I suppose, for I never saw him again, and he sent me a letter from Queensland, in which he said he was working for a baker, but what he knew about baking I cannot tell. At any rate I never heard from him again, and as what I am speaking of happened pretty well ten years ago, I suppose I shall hear no more of him. But I often think of Cousin William, and how he fared with his sound investment.

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